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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 November 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 291

SUBJECT: Change of Government in Iraq

1. Disagreement between the government and opposition parties over electoral reform culminated in street rioting in Baghdad on November 22-23, which precipitated the fall of the government of el Umari and led to the establishment of a new government at the request of the Regent by General Murrudin Mahmud, Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Army.

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2. The political situation in Iraq has long been dominated, by the Palace and a clique of politicians of whom Nuri es Said is the most influential. Opposition political parties have found themselves blocked by a system of indirect elections which kept Parliament in the hands of the established interests. In July 1952 Prime Minister Nuri es Said withdrew in favor of a caretaker government under Umari so that elections could be held as provided by the constitution. Since then, the opposition parties have increased their demands for electoral reform and have advocated land reform, tax reform, a curtailment of royal powers, and have discussed nationalization of the oil industry.

3. The Regent returned from a sojourn abroad on October 26 and dissolved the Parliament on the following day. By dissolving Parliament he made it virtually impossible for an electoral reform law to be passed before the coming elections. Opposition parties petitioned for reconsideration and, when they were refused, the extremist parties announced a boycott of the elections. El Umari and Nuri es Said sought to divide the opposition by offering a compromise. The situation remained in suspense until Saleh Jahar, head of the Umma Party, former Prime Minister, and most important opposition leader, on November 20 rejected the government's compromise and called upon the people to "prevent" the elections and blamed the government in advance for "such serious consequences as may arise." Thus the moderate and the extremist opposition parties were temporarily united against the government.

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4. The rioting began with student demonstrations protesting government mistreatment of students of the college of pharmacy and chemistry but soon switched to the theme of electoral reform. In concentrating on the USIS building, the British Embassy and el Kuari's headquarters the rioters followed the normal pattern for Iraq, where the association of the established political interests with the UK makes anti-government agitation automatically anti-Western. Communist activity has been accelerated in Iraq in recent months, and the Communists almost certainly were an important element in the rioting, but there is no reason to believe that the incidents of November 22-23 were Communist initiated or dominated.

5. General Murrudin Mahmoud, the new Prime Minister is said to be an able officer, and is reputed to be well-disposed toward the British. The fact that his appointment as Chief of Staff came from Nuri es Said and that the Regent requested him to form a government after a neutral ex-Prime Minister had failed indicate that General Mahmoud is acting for the established political interests. He has invoked martial law, abolished all political parties, set up severe censorship regulations, and promised extensive reforms. An estimated one hundred and twenty persons have been arrested, including many known Communists and leaders of opposition political parties. There is, as yet, no indication that General Mahmoud's government is or will become a military dictatorship.

6. The developments of 22-23 November seem to have left the traditional ruling class in control in Iraq, though with a military man as the instrument of power. Iraq is not necessarily faced with a choice between the path that has been followed by Iran and that now being followed by Egypt, but the Palace and the politicians will find it extremely difficult to maintain control of the situation without some change in their formula.

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